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AUTHOR White, Liane E.; And Others
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ABSTRACT

The sixth National Education Goal is to make every school in America free of drugs and violence and offer a disciplined environment for learning. Crime, violence, and discipline problems in public schools are increasing public concerns. Although it is difficult to assess the extent of these problems in public schools, reports suggest the situation is worsening. A National School Boards Association survey found that 82 percent of responding school districts said violence had increased at their schools over the past 5 years. A small percentage of uppergrade students regularly carry a weapon to school. Many teachers also reported having been physically attacked, threatened with injury, or verbally abused by students in school. Over the past several decades, Congress has responded to increasing concerns over school safety and youth violence. In the 1970s, Congress held numerous hearings and commissioned studies on the issues. In the 1980s, Congress was concerned over the drug use and classroom discipline issues, and continued to be concerned over these issues into the 1990s. The 102d and 103d Congresses have enacted a number of bills that support education and work to reduce violence, promote safety, and help schools achieve the sixth National Education Goal. (JPT)

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CRS Report for Congress

Violence in Schools: An Overview

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Liane E. White
Deborah A. Curry
Technical Information Specialists
and
James B. Stedman
Specialist in Social Legislation
Education and Public Welfare Division

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VIOLENCE IN SCHOOLS: AN OVERVIEW

SUMMARY

Goal six of the National Education Goals states: "By the year 2000, every school in America will be free of drugs and violence and will offer a disciplined environment conducive for learning." This goal was adopted largely in response to surveys indicating that, in a large percentage of elementary and secondary schools, violence, misbehavior and drug use interfere with the educational process.

While crime, violence, and discipline problems in the schools are not new, there is an increasing perception by the American public that many schools have become dangerous places. However, definitively assessing the extent of crime or violence and discipline issues in the schools is a problematic undertaking given the complexities and difficulties associated with collecting data on the issue. With an understanding of these limitations, recent reports suggest some of the current conditions in the Nation's schools as follows:

- 82 percent of 729 school districts responding to a National School Boards Association survey said that violence in their schools has increased over the past 5 years;

- 2 percent of 8th graders, 4 percent of 10th graders and 3 percent of 12 graders nationwide indicate that they regularly (10 or more days in the previous month) carried a weapon to school; and

- 19 percent of public school teachers reported that they had been verbally abused in the last four weeks, 8 percent reported being threatened with injury in the last 12 months, and 2 percent reported being physically attacked in the last 12 months.

Over the past several decades, the Congress has been concerned about the problem of school safety and youth violence. During the 1970s, both the House and Senate held numerous hearings and mandated studies on the issues of school safety, violence, and vandalism. During the 1980s, Congress expanded its examination by also considering the issues of drug use and classroom and school discipline. In 1984 the National School Safety Center was created by a Presidential directive and in 1986 Congress enacted the Drug-Free Schools and Communities Act.

This congressional concern has carried over into the 102d and 103d Congresses. For instance, the Higher Education Amendments of 1992 support training for individuals in early childhood development or individuals who work with young children affected by violence. In addition, in the 103d Congress, a number of bills have been proposed that support education and activities in schools to reduce violence, promote safety, and help schools achieve the sixth National Education Goal.

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VIOLENCE IN SCHOOLS: AN OVERVIEW[1]

INTRODUCTION

Goal six of the National Education Goals states: "By the year 2000, every school in America will be free of drugs and violence and will offer a disciplined environment conducive for learning."[2] These goals were established by the President and the Nation's Governors in 1990 as part of a comprehensive strategy to improve America's schools. Goal six, in particular, was adopted largely in response to surveys indicating that, in a significant percentage of elementary and secondary schools, violence, misbehavior and drug use interfere with the educational process.[3] This report discusses the nature and extent of violence in the Nation's schools and reviews prior and current congressional efforts to address this problem.

SCOPE OF THE PROBLEM

Crime, violence, and discipline problems in the schools are not new. Safety issues have been a constant concern of many observers and policymakers inside and outside of the school setting for decades. Recently, however, the is an increasing perception by the American public that many schools have become dangerous places. Understanding the causes of school violence is difficult, primarily because it is the complex product of personal, social, and cultural forces. Nevertheless, schools must deal with the consequences, including student and staff victimization, disruption of learning, teacher burnout, fear and demoralization, potential legal liability,[4] and financial loss. They are also called upon to help prevent drug and violence problems in the society at large through in-school prevention programs.

In 1990, when President Bush and the Governors presented the sixth National Education Goal, the discussion predominately centered around drug use, awareness, and education. Over the past few years, however, increased attention has been given to achieving safe and violence-free schools. This shift appears partially due to

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[1]The original research and draft report were completed by Deborah A. Curry, a former Senior Technical Information Specialist at the Congressional Research Service.

[2]For a discussion of the National Education Goals, see: U.S. Library of Congress. Congressional Research Service. *Goals 2000: Educate America Act*. CRS Report for Congress No. 93-457, by James Stedman, Richard Apling, and Wayne Riddle. Washington, 1993.

[3]Department of Education (ED). *Reaching Goal 6: Safe, Disciplined and Drug-Free Schools*. Washington, Feb. 1993. (Hereafter cited as ED, *Reaching Goal 6.*)

[4]Commentators note that the "serious challenge of restoring a safe school environment has begun to reshape the law." Examples of this shift are potential civil liability for unsafe campus climates, parental liability statutes, and in the case of California, a constitutional right to attend campuses which are safe, secure, and peaceful. (Nicholson, George. *School Safety*. National School Safety Center Report. Winter, 1986.)

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decreased levels of reported drug use by young Americans[5] in recent years and the evidence suggesting a recent increase in violent behavior in the Nation's schools.

Goal six has also been a catalyst for highlighting the relationship of violence and discipline problems to teaching and learning. A number of reports have emphasized an orderly and safe school environment as a prerequisite for meaningful school reform as well as an element of an effective school.[6] Some experts believe that schools can play a pivotal role in developing strategies and programs that minimize violence and disruptions and maximize students' learning experience.

Recent Data on the Extent of the Problem

Definitively assessing the extent of crime or violence and discipline problems in the schools is a problematic undertaking given the complexity of data collecting on this issue. A review of the current research on the magnitude of the problem reveals the following conceptual and methodological problems:

- national statistics have not been compiled in a consistent manner;
- there are differences in definition and wording of the indicators;
- survey data are collected from a representative sample of youth rather than reports of actual incidents;
- few States or local education authorities collect or publicize school violence statistics;[7]
- the time periods covered by available data differ, often requiring extrapolation to create a consistent frame of reference; and
- there is a tendency to underreport incidents of crimes or violence.[8]

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[5]For further information see: U.S. Library of Congress. Congressional Research Service. *The Drug-Free Schools and Communities Act*. CRS Report for Congress No. 93-1056, by Edward Klebe. Washington, 1993. It should be noted that the newest findings show a slight rise in adolescent drug and alcohol use, perhaps leading to greater Federal and national interest in these issues. For further information see: National Institute on Drug Use. *National Survey Results on Drug Use From the Monitoring of the Future Study*. Washington, 1994.

[6]ED, *Reaching Goal Six*.

[7]Only two States, California and South Carolina, collect and publish annual statistics on school violence. (Congressional Quarterly, Inc. Violence in Schools. *CQ Researcher*. Sept. 11, 1992.)

[8]Several researchers note the tendency to underreport the incidents of violence and misbehavior in the schools. Some of the reasons for downplaying these incidents are fear, retaliation, and the view that these incidents are minor in nature. See for example: Moles, Oliver C. *Trends in Student Misconduct: The 70s and 80s*. Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association. Washington, 1987. For a list of the reasons why schools play down crime and how the inaction of the administrators, teachers and school boards contribute to the problem, see: Rapp, James A. *School Crime and Violence: Victims Rights*. Malibu, 1987.

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The last major comprehensive study of the issue was the former National Institute of Education's Violent Schools--Safe Schools Study (SSS) commissioned by Congress and issued in 1978.[9] The findings of the report indicated that crime was a serious problem that had peaked during the 1960s and 1970s. Recent reports and studies, however, suggest a resurgence of the problem. Selected findings from a number of publications[10] depicting trends and the current conditions in schools are presented below:

- During the past 12 years, threats and injuries to high school seniors and theft of their property have risen;[11]
- 82 percent of 729 school districts responding to a National School Boards Association survey said that violence in their schools had increased over the past 5 years;
- Reported crime and violent incidents in the New York City public schools rose 16 percent between the 1991-92 school year and the 1992-93 school year;
- In 1992, 2 percent of 8th graders, 4 percent of 10th graders and 3 percent of 12 graders nationwide reported that they regularly (10 or more days in the previous month) carried a weapon to school;[12]
- In 1992, 14 percent to 19 percent of 8th, 10th, and 12th graders nationwide reported being threatened with a weapon and 25 percent to 29 percent reported being threatened without a weapon in school;

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[9]National Institute of Education. *Violent Schools--Safe Schools*. Washington, 1978.

[10]The statistics in this section are drawn from: The National Education Goals Panel. *The National Education Goals Report: Building a Nation of Learners*. Washington, 1993. (Hereafter cited as National Education Goals Panel, *The National Education Goals Report)*; National School Board Association. *Violence in the Schools--How America's School Boards Are Safeguarding Our Children*. Alexandria, 1993; and Barbanel, Josh. School Crime Rises 16% Prompting Security Moves. *The New York Times*, Sept. 16, 1993. p. B3. The Goals Report presents information compiled by researchers at the University of Michigan and the National Center for Education Statistics. These reports represent some of the most recent data and are directly tied to the school setting. Indeed, the National Goals Report was created to begin to provide baseline and comparable data with respect to the Nation's progress towards the six national education goals.

[11]National Education Goals Panel, *The National Education Goals Report*. The National Goals Report is limited to trends on 12th graders because 1991 was the first year it collected data on 8th and 10th graders. Additionally, certain indicators are limited to analysis of a couple of years because baseline data collection began recently. For examples of research or surveys showing an increase in violence levels see: ED. *Disorder in our Public Schools: Report of the Cabinet Council on Human Resources (CCHR)*. Working Group on School Violence. Washington, 1984; and New York State United Teachers. *Conflict in the Classroom: Drawing the Line on Bad Behavior. A Special Report*. New York, 1993. (Hereafter cited as New York State United Teachers, *Conflict in the Classroom)*

[12]National Education Goals Panel, *The National Goals Report*. A weapon, in this instance, refers to one of the following: knife, gun, or club.

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- In 1992, 5 percent to 9 percent of 8th, 10th, and 12th graders, nationwide, reported being injured with a weapon in school;

- In 1991, more than 30 percent of all high school teachers felt that student misbehavior interfered with their teaching; and

- In 1991, 19 percent of public school teachers reported that they had been verbally abused in the last 4 weeks, 8 percent reported being threatened with injury in the last 12 months and 2 percent reported being physically attacked in the last 12 months.

The portrait drawn from these and other data suggests that violence and discipline are a serious problem in the Nation's schools. While violence and disorder are not characteristic of **all** the Nation's schools, it is generally agreed that present levels are unacceptable. In addition, surveys and reports show that these problems are not confined to the central cities, as believed by many, but have spread to schools in the suburbs and rural areas.[13] However, it appears that much of the current attention to school safety has been sparked by gun-related violence on school property. The report, *Caught in the Crossfire: A Report on Gun Violence In Our Nation's Schools*,[14] presents the following statistics based on newspaper accounts between 1986 and 1990:

- at least 71 persons (65 students and 6 school employees) were killed with guns at school, 201 were severely wounded, and 242 were held at gunpoint;

- schoolchildren 14 to 17 years old are most at risk of gun violence at school;

- gang or drug disputes were the leading cause of gun-related violence (18 percent); and

- shootings or hostage situations in the schools occurred in at least 35 States and the District of Columbia.

CONGRESSIONAL RESPONSES

Many educators and non-educators agree that school violence and misbehavior are disruptive to teaching and learning. Further, many observers assert that, although

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[13]For instance, 10 percent of students from 'central city' districts, 9 percent of students from 'suburban' districts, and 8 percent of students from 'nonmetropolitan' districts reported at least one victimization at their school in the past 6 months. Source: U.S. Department of Justice. Bureau of Justice Statistics. *School Crime: A National Victimization Survey Report*. By Lisa D. Bastian and Bruce M. Taylor. Washington, 1991.

[14]The report relies on the accuracy of local news stories across the country because few States compile data on this issue. See: Center to Prevent Handgun Violence. *Caught in the Crossfire: A Report on Gun Violence in Our Nation's Schools*. Washington, Sept. 1990.

responsibility for school safety rests with State and local officials and communities, inadequate financial resources and limited research on the scope of the problem and effective remedies hamper efforts to provide a disciplined, violence-free environment in many schools. For these reasons, some have advocated Federal intervention to provide funding for school safety programs, research on the causes of school violence and effective remedies, and national leadership on this issue which affects schools across the country.

Previous Congressional Efforts

During the 1970s, both the House and the Senate held numerous hearings and mandated studies on the issues of school safety, violence, and vandalism.[15] The only comprehensive study on the subject, the Safe Schools Study (SSS), was mandated by the Congress. Extensive congressional attention to the issue of school violence and safety, along with findings of the SSS, culminated in the authorization of a program of special grants for safe schools as part of the amendments to the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) in 1978.[16]

The purpose of the program of special grants was to provide financial assistance to 15 local education agencies (LEAs) to help reduce problems of school violence and vandalism. The authorization for the Special Grants for Safe Schools program was set at $15 million. The legislation required LEAs to adopt and implement a safety plan. Funds could then be used for acquisition of security equipment and personnel, minor alterations to the school plant, staff training on crime control, provision of program information to parents and the general public, and adoption of administrative guidelines that would encourage school officials to report crimes occurring in school to law enforcement agencies. Although the program was authorized in 1978, funds were never appropriated for it and this provision of the ESEA was repealed in 1981.[17]

During the 1980s, Congress continued its examination of school violence through hearings and studies. Congress also considered the issues of drug use, school discipline, and classroom discipline. The National School Safety Center was created by Presidential Directive in 1984. The Center is a partnership between the U.S. Department of Justice, ED, and Pepperdine University. Its mandate is to: focus national attention on safety issues and cooperative solutions to school crime, violence,

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[15]During discussion of Representative Biaggi's amendment to ESEA that created the special grant program, the Representative notes an extensive list of hearings or studies on school violence and vandalism. See: Biaggi, Mario. Remarks in the Congress. *Congressional Record*, v. 124, part 16. July 13, 1978. p. 20634-20637.

[16]P. L. 89-10, Title IX, Part D, Special Grants for Safe Schools.

[17] Repealed by P. L.97-35, 95 Stat. 480, effective Oct. 1, 1982.

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drugs and discipline problems; provide technical assistance, legal and legislative aid; and act as a clearinghouse for information on school safety.[18]

In 1986, Congress enacted the Anti-Drug Abuse Act (P.L. 99-570) which contained provisions for the Drug-Free Schools and Communities Act. In 1988, it was amended and reauthorized as title V of the ESEA by the Hawkins/Stafford Elementary and Secondary School Improvement Amendments of 1988 (P.L. 100-297) and has been the subject of subsequent amendments since that time.[19] The purpose of the Act, among other things, is to provide for substance abuse prevention activities and training of school personnel.[20]

The 102d Congress produced a number of legislative proposals to address school and youth violence. For instance, the Higher Education Amendments of 1992 (P.L. 102-325) amending the Higher Education Act of 1965, supports training for individuals in early childhood development or individuals who work with young children affected by violence. Under the program, 3 to 5 discretionary grants are awarded annually to institutions of higher education. The FY 1993 appropriation was $5 million and the amount appropriated for FY 1994 has been increased to $14 million.

The Present Response

This congressional concern over school safety carried over into the 103d Congress. For example, S. 1125 and H.R. 2455, the Safe Schools Act of 1993, establishes a competitive grant program for local education agencies to support education and activities in schools to reduce violence, promote safety, and help schools achieve the sixth national education goal. H.R. 3355, the omnibus crime legislation, includes a Safe Schools Act provision that authorizes school-based education and training aimed at addressing school safety and violence. [21]

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[18]Another example of Federal involvement is the School Management and Resource Teams (SMART) which was jointly funded by the Department of Justice and ED and administered by the National Alliance of Safe Schools. The program, which was funded between 1981 and 1991, experimented with models of management in schools to reduce violent behavior and drug use. (Source: ED. *The National Education Goals: A Second Report to the Nation's Governors*. Washington, 1991.)

[19]The Drug-Free Schools and Communities Act was further amended by the 1988 Anti-Drug Act (P.L. 100-690), the Drug-Free Schools and Communities Act Amendments of 1989 (P.L 101-226), and the Crime Control Act of 1990 (P.L. 101-647).

[20]For further discussion of the program see: U.S. Library of Congress. Congressional Research Service. *National Drug Control Strategy, 1989: Background and Policy Questions*. CRS Report for Congress No. 89-567 GOV, by Harry Hogan. Washington, 1989; and U.S. Library of Congress. Congressional Research Service. *Drug and Alcohol Abuse: Prevention, Treatment and Education*. CRS Report for Congress No. 86-1052 EPW, by Edward Klebe. Washington, 1986.

[21]For more information see: U.S. Library of Congress. Congressional Research Service. *School Safety Education and Training Programs Acted Upon by the 103d Congress During Its First Session*. General Distribution Memorandum, by James Stedman and Liane White. Dec. 10, 1993.

There are also currently several programs, many in cooperation with ED, that by addressing other concerns, such as crime in the general community, are attempting to address violence and misbehavior issues in the classroom and in the school. Among the Federal initiatives are the following:

- the Gun-Free School Zone Act[22] makes it a Federal crime to possess or to discharge a loaded firearm on school property or within 1,000 feet of an elementary or secondary school;[23]

- "Safe Havens," a part of the Weed and Seed program, provide educational, recreational, and cultural activities for high-risk youth in a safe setting after school;[24] and

- "Project Smart" (School Management and Resource Teams) helps schools collect and analyze data relating to school crime, drug use, and disciplinary infractions.

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[22]For further discussion see: U.S. Library of Congress. Congressional Research Service. *Crime Control Act of 1990 (P.L. 101-647): Summary*. CRS Report for Congress No. 91-69 GOV, coordinated by Harry Hogan. Washington, 1991.

[23]One report noted that violators are rarely prosecuted by the Federal Government. See: New York State United Teachers, *Conflict in the Classroom*.

[24]For discussion of the Weed and Seed Program see: U.S. Library of Congress. Congressional Research Service. *The Weed and Seed Program: An Overview*. CRS Report for Congress No. 93-192 GOV, by Suzanne Cavanagh, Eugene Boyd, and David Teasley. Washington, 1993.

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